

THE BIODIVERSITY OF YANCEY COUNTY

Information regarding the rare species and community types of the county is derived from the findings of this inventory as well as information archived at the N.C. Natural Heritage Program (NC NHP) in Raleigh. Detailed information for rare species and community occurrences can be obtained on request through the NC NHP. The current status and presence of rare species and communities in the county can be obtained through the NC NHP internet website at www.ncnhp.org. The state rare plant and animal lists are also available on the website as downloadable files. Other information on rare species and natural community types, such as global distribution and rarity, can be obtained by accessing the Explorer database on the NatureServe website: www.natureserve.org/explorer/ or by contacting the NC NHP.

NATURAL COMMUNITY TYPES

A natural community is defined as a distinct and reoccurring assemblage of populations of plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi naturally associated with each other and their physical environment. Natural communities can be recognized as distinct forest, rock outcrop, woodland, or wetland types. The 23 natural community types that are known from Yancey County are shown in Table 1. The community types follow the current community classification used by the NC NHP (Schafale and Weakley 1990). In Table 1 they are arranged in ecological categories that reflect relationships between them. Ranks that indicate their global and in-state rarity are provided, with an explanation of ranks at the end of the table. The ranks for the community types were developed by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program from information on their rarity range-wide (i.e., globally) and in-state. For additional information on these communities and their floristics from a statewide perspective, refer to Schafale and Weakley (1990). The occurrences of community types at individual sites are described in the Site Descriptions section of this report. Natural community types of middle and high elevations are well-represented in the county.

Natural community types are a distinct form of biodiversity, important in their own right and also important as “coarse filters” in conservation -- protection of natural communities can simultaneously protect uncommon or rare species that they may support. However, sites of biological significance usually contain one to several good examples of natural community types, with or without the presence of rare species. The quality, condition, extent, and rarity of natural communities have a strong influence on site significance. The extent of exemplary natural communities, rather than the location of rare species, often dictates the location of site boundaries.

The base elevation for Yancey County is near 3000 feet in many areas. Forest community types of middle elevations (i.e., 3000-4500 feet) and high elevations (i.e., above 4500 feet) are well represented in the mountains of Yancey County. Twelve of the 23 types known for the county have a forest physiognomy. Forest types encountered frequently at middle elevations include Rich Cove Forest, Acidic Cove Forest, Montane Oak--Hickory Forest, and less often Chestnut Oak Forest. Representative examples of Canada Hemlock Forest, Swamp Forest--Bog Complex, and Montane